

YOUR FOOD: Just how clean is it?

BRITAIN is to launch the biggest scientific investigation by any country into food safety. It will analyse our food to establish how much toxic chemical residue it contains.

A national survey will begin next month and will take two years. It may continue permanently, depending on the results of the first year.

The survey is being run by the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations, the Urban Districts Councils Association and the Association of Public Analysts. About 200 local authorities will be involved.

England and Wales will be divided into seven zones and each will take and analyse between 300 and 400 food samples.

They will include fruit, vegetables, butter, fish, baby foods, milk, eggs and meat.

By IAIN CAMPBELL

HOW dangerous is the food we eat? The official view is that there is no danger. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which maintains a constant check on insecticides, says: "We have no real reason to think there is cause for alarm in the residues we are finding."

The purpose of the investigation is to establish the level of insecticide in our food.

An official of the County Councils Association said yesterday: "We hope to throw up isolated cases where the level is unduly high, to backtrack, to find out why, and to point the way to preventive action."

"We shall try to establish how much residue an individual is likely to assimilate in a year. If we can show the average level of DDT is so low that the problem is minimal, we shall have set aside alarmist rumours."

Power

"If the level is shown to be high it would mean there is something to be concerned about and that basic research needs to be pressed on with."

"The last thing we want to do is to give the impression we have cause for alarm. We haven't. We expect this survey will dispel public concern."

A similar investigation is being carried out by the Agricultural Research Council in co-operation with chemical firms and universities.

The problem is that although everyone now carries in his body fat an accumulation of about two million parts of insecticide, no danger level has been established. And there are reports that show the increasing power and durability of farmland chemicals.

The International Oceanographic Commission reports that insecticide residues have been found in Arctic penguins and in tuna caught 200 miles out at sea.

It was told that insecticides, fuel oil and radio-active wastes seeping from corroding dumping drums threaten to kill many forms of sea life and to turn some ocean areas sterile.

Scientists at the National Vegetable Research Station at Warwick estimate that the top half-centimetre of cropland in England and Wales now contains a total residue of 30 tons of DDT, eight tons of dieldrin, two tons of Gamma-BHC and one ton of aldrin.

These are chemicals used against insects, for seed dressing and in sheep dips. The use of dieldrin and aldrin has now been restricted.

Tricks

Traces of DDT and aldrin have been found in rainwater in England. It is thought insecticides may evaporate from the ground, or during spraying, to be returned again in rain.

In America an experiment has shown the ability of quail to learn simple tricks decreased when they were fed with food which contained DDT to an amount which until then had been thought to be safe.

The test has led U.S. scientists to ask if DDT in food can be dulling our brains.

In England and in the United States traces of DDT have been found in human milk.

As the synthetic organic chemistry industry produces

more and more new chemicals, problems similar to those found in the medical drug field have developed.

In Britain some insecticides have been banned and the use of others restricted. DDT has not been shown to be a hazard and is still being used.

In the meantime the Henry

Doubleday Research Association is shortly to publish a British clean food guide which will tell shopkeepers where they can buy non-chemical food.

An official of the association, which promotes research into non-chemical growing and has no connection with the Doubleday publishing firm, said yesterday:

"We feel not enough is known about toxic chemicals and that not enough is being done about learning more."

"We do not want to alarm the public, but we do want official action."

In the United States, following a scientific report that the Romans lost their empire because their brains were weakened by lead-contaminated water, President Johnson has ordered a nationwide survey into chemicals, drugs and air pollution.

How dangerous is the air in Britain?

The Ministry of Technology says the Clean Air Act has almost beaten the problem in the south of England, although the north still lags.



Mail readers
finding
anything to
the left of
centre

Your Food: Just how clean is it?.

Iain Campbell.

Daily Mail (London, England), Friday, July 01, 1966; pg. 19; Issue 21825. (852 words)

Category: News

© Associated Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:EE1863624941